

County of Los Angeles
DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC SOCIAL SERVICES

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October 20, 2005

TO: Each Supervisor

FROM: Bryce Yokomizo, Director 
Department of Public Social Services

Marvin Southard, Director 
Department of Mental Health

Thomas Garthwaite, Director 
Department of Health Services

David Sanders, Director 
Department of Children and Family Services

SUBJECT: HOMELESS FAMILIES AND INDIVIDUALS ON SKID ROW

As your Board is aware, our departments have implemented numerous strategies to respond to homeless families and individuals on Skid Row, which has entailed the commitment of substantial County resources. Though these actions have had a positive impact, as described in this week's Los Angeles Times, there continue to be homeless families and individuals on Skid Row whose circumstances necessitate additional actions by the County.

To address the needs of homeless families on Skid Row, effective immediately, our departments will take the following additional actions:

- Department of Public Social Services (DPSS) staff will visit each shelter and mission on Skid Row each business day to provide information and take applications from families with children for DPSS benefits and services.
- A DPSS homeless case manager will join the Skid Row Outreach Team (SROT) which has been comprised of staff from the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS), the Department of Mental Health (DMH), and the Los Angeles Homeless Shelter Authority (LAHSA). Direct DPSS participation on the SROT will further ensure that homeless families on Skid Row have access to the DPSS benefits and services to which they are entitled.

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- DCFS staff will ensure that every child encountered by the SROT will be assessed for DCFS intervention and appropriately referred. All children referred will be provided with a child safety and risk assessment.
- DMH will ensure access to CalWORKs mental health services for eligible families.
- DHS will ensure access to CalWORKs substance abuse services for eligible families.
- DPSS will establish a protocol to address the needs of homeless families who come to Skid Row while receiving CalWORKs benefits in another county, which was the circumstance surrounding one of the families at the Midnight Mission on October 18, 2005.
- Pursuant to a prior instruction from your Board, from February – August 2005, DPSS submitted a monthly report on the families served by the SROT. We will resume these monthly reports and will expand them to include the activities of the DPSS staff visiting the shelters and missions and the results of the DCFS child safety evaluations.

To assist homeless adults on Skid Row, our departments provide a wide range of services, including emergency shelter, General Relief benefits, advocacy for Supplemental Security Income/State Supplemental Payments (SSI/SSP) benefits, mental health services, HIV/STD/TB/other public health screening and treatment, and substance abuse treatment. Though these services are helpful to many adults who are and have been homeless on Skid Row, they are not sufficient to adequately address their needs and there are numerous individuals who have been unable to access these services for a variety of reasons or barriers. To address these limitations, additional resources, specific interventions, and partnerships may need to be developed.

To further address the needs of homeless adults on Skid Row, we will take the following actions:

- Explore whether there are ways to assist more disabled adults on Skid Row to qualify for SSI/SSP through the expansion of current SSI advocacy programs.
- Conduct a comprehensive assessment of the current services which our departments provide to homeless adults on Skid Row, with specific attention to opportunities to more effectively integrate those services.
- Consult with other key partners who could assist us in addressing the needs of homeless adults on Skid Row, including but not limited to the Sheriff's Department, Community Development Commission, federal Social Security Administration, City of Los Angeles, Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority, and homeless service providers on Skid Row.

- Develop recommendations to your Board regarding enhancements to services which we provide and other potential actions to address the needs of homeless adults on Skid Row.

In conducting this assessment and developing our recommendations, we will take into account the wide array of complex issues which impact the County's role in relation to homeless adults on Skid Row, which include the following:

- The State and federal government do not provide cash assistance to single adults, except for the elderly or disabled who can qualify for SSI/SSP.
- Homeless single adults have limited access to federally-funded health and mental health services.
- Services for undocumented immigrants are extremely limited.
- Individuals who are disabled due to substance abuse are not eligible to SSI/SSP.
- Substance abuse and/or mental health problems are very common among homeless adults on Skid Row.
- Homeless adults on Skid Row have frequently been in the County jail system.
- Services for homeless adults are severely limited in most areas of the County outside of Skid Row, and many cities have actively resisted the siting of homeless services, emergency shelter and/or affordable housing within their jurisdictions.

We will submit our recommendations regarding services to homeless single adults, along with the results of our assessment and consultations, within 30 days.

The County health and human services departments are committed to assisting homeless families and individuals on Skid Row in their pursuit of permanent housing, good health, physical safety, and economic stability.

BY:MS:TG:DS:cl

c: Chief Administrative Officer
County Counsel
Executive Officer, Board of Supervisors
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